

VZCZCXRO9752
PP RUEHMA RUEHPA
DE RUEHRY #0211/01 1421132
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 211132Z MAY 08
FM AMEMBASSY CONAKRY
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2546
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 CONAKRY 000211

SIPDIS
SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [ASEC](#) [GV](#)
SUBJECT: FORMER PM HOLDS MEETING ON ELECTIONS - DEMANDS
DONOR SUPPORT

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. On May 13, former Prime Minister Lansana Kouyate held a three and a half hour meeting with political parties to discuss progress towards Guinea's legislative elections later this year. The discussion focused on four central issues: the need for donor community support to cover the remaining \$10 million budget gap, voter registration, campaign financing, and elections timing. Ambassador Carter asked the PM what the Guinean Government is doing to cover the funding gap, but the PM sidestepped the question and later said there is no shame in asking for assistance. The discussion illustrates that there is little progress on the same questions that have been circulating for nearly a year, and that if the elections fail, Guineans will likely blame the international community. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Joining the PM in the meeting were the president of the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI), Ben Sekou Syllah, and the Secretary General of the Ministry of Interior and Security (MIS), Baillo Diallo. Various diplomatic missions were represented including the United Nations, France, Japan, the European Union, Spain, and ECOWAS. Ambassador Carter attended and was accompanied by the USAID Director and Poloff. The press were allowed a brief photo opportunity in the beginning and then awkwardly escorted out before the meeting began, their muted protests suggesting that they were not aware that they would be asked to leave.

LOOKING FOR SYNERGY

¶3. (SBU) The PM apologized for the absence of the Minister of Interior and Security who he said was away on a trip. Speaking informally, without prepared remarks, Kouyate told the group that he wanted to hold the meeting in order to encourage synergy, assess progress, and identify challenges.

PROGRESS REPORT

¶4. (SBU) On behalf of the Minister, the MIS Secretary General read a lengthy status report regarding the ministry's activities with respect to elections. Noting ongoing debates about voter identification requirements, MIS proposed that two witnesses could provide adequate proof of identity for purposes of registering to vote, and that the voter identification card should be the sole piece of identification required in order to vote on Election Day. Turning to the chronogram of preparatory activities, the Secretary General pointed out that there have already been some delays, which are mostly due to the delayed arrival of voter registration kits (supplied by the European Union), but

that the elections will still be held between November 23 and December 14. The MIS also discussed budgetary issues, and requested donor assistance in covering a \$10.7 million funding gap.

15. (SBU) On behalf of the CENI, Ben Syllah also provided a status report on recent activities, including the recent installation of local-level electoral commissions. Syllah said that the CENI has had to increase its operating budget by 17% for unanticipated programmatic expenses as well as to cover inflationary costs for fuel and other organizational supplies. (COMMENT. Subsequent discussion indicated that the CENI's additional budgetary request was not reflected in the MIS funding gap, which means that the total budget gap is more in the neighborhood of \$14.7 million).

16. (SBU) During the ensuing discussion, political party representatives repeatedly raised shared concerns, which focused on the funding gap, voter registration and identification, campaign financing, and timing.

DONOR COMMUNITY NEEDS TO PUT MORE INTO THE POT

17. (SBU) Political party after political party requested that the donor community come up with the funds to cover the \$10 million funding gap. Several representatives expressed concern over the timing and organization of the elections if the funding issues are not resolved soon. Although most participants, including the PM, seemed to feel that the donor community is the only answer, at least two political parties said that they were ashamed and/or embarrassed that Guinea

CONAKRY 00000211 002 OF 003

could not fund its own elections.

VOTER IDENTIFICATION

18. (SBU) Most political parties were concerned about voter registration issues, but for different reasons. Some parties argued that voters should be required to present a national identification card, in addition to their voter card, because otherwise Sierra Leonians and Liberians could easily vote in Guinean elections. Other parties said that the voter card should be the only piece of identification required in order to avoid opportunities for fraud. Still other parties said that both cards should be required, but the international community could facilitate the process by issuing national i.d. cards when they issue the voter cards. Several participants, including the PM and the MIS Secretary General, urged the assembled group to decide the issue that same day, but the meeting adjourned with no discussion of a vote, or consensus decision.

CAMPAIGN FINANCING

19. (SBU) Several parties raised the issue of campaign financing and asked that the government fulfill its legal obligation to provide funds to political parties, as per the legislation that was voted into law by the National Assembly in May 2007. Ousmane Bah of the Union for Progress and Renewal (UPR) opposition party, and also the minority leader within the National Assembly, questioned the legality of the law, saying that it had not been officially promulgated and signed by the president. The MIS Secretary General later said that the legislation became law after ten days even without the president's signature. (COMMENT. Although Guinean law provides that approved legislation becomes law after 10 days regardless of whether the president signs it or not, in practice, Guineans generally wait for the president's official blessing. END COMMENT). The PM told the political

parties that he had already directed the Minister of Finance to release the promised funds, totaling \$333,000. "The procedure is in process," he said.

ELECTIONS TIMING

¶10. (SBU) Related to the elections chronogram and delays in getting the voter registration process under way, several political parties expressed concern over whether the elections could be held as currently scheduled. Some were critical of the donor community because of its role in the voter registration process. One party representative pointed out that the voter registration process would not start until late June, just when the rainy season starts to take off, making it difficult to complete the process according to schedule. Another party representative said that the most important thing is to have a "good election," implying that the actual date is less important.

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

¶11. (SBU) The United Nations Resident Representative stressed the need for an effective civic education campaign, preferably before the voter registration kits are put into service. The EU Ambassador echoed concerns about voter education, and announced that the EU plans to contribute an additional \$2 million euros, which they had not yet discussed with the Guinean Government. The PM called on Ambassador Carter and jokingly asked if he wanted to announce any plans for U.S. assistance. Ambassador Carter said that the U.S. is planning to finance over \$4 million in various elections activities, which was not reflected in the MIS budget. He also pointed out that Guinea's contribution to the cost of national elections represents only 27% of the total budget. He asked him point blank "Mr. PM, what you are going to do to cover this gap?"

CENI PUSHES BACK

¶12. (SBU) When the PM asked the CENI to address some of the
CONAKRY 00000211 003 OF 003

political parties' concerns, in good humor, Ben Syllah said "I think I mostly heard thanks and compliments for what the CENI is doing." However, Syllah stressed that the parties have not been participating as actively as they should be in the preparatory activities. He reminded the participants that the CENI is composed of political parties and said "I advise you to correct any imperfections in future elections." Regarding the issue of campaign financing, Syllah encouraged each party to send five representatives to the table to negotiate the distribution of funds.

PM LECTURES ON DEMOCRACY

¶13. (SBU) Before closing the meeting, the PM lectured for some 20 minutes about democracy as he essentially justified Guinea's poor showing with respect to elections financing. Although he said that his first priority is to find money to cover the funding gap, his subsequent comments indicated that he expects to get that money from the donor community. He said that every country present in the room had benefited from foreign aid at one time or another, and Guinea should not be ashamed to request assistance in order to strengthen its democracy.

NO PLACE FOR WOMEN

¶14. (SBU) In a room of more than sixty people, there were only three Guinean women present, and none of them were sitting at the negotiating table. All of the political parties were represented by men. At one point during the discussion, an elderly political party representative complained about the large number of "young girls" the CENI hired to staff the local electoral commissions and voter registration teams. Ben Syllah told them that "we decided in this same room to do that." He then encouraged the parties to increase the number of women on their candidate lists, which they had also discussed as a group. That comment elicited loud grumblings from the group, with several parties shaking their heads vehemently.

COMMENT

¶15. (SBU) Although lengthy and often times repetitive, the meeting was useful in the sense that it brought everyone together to focus on key issues. However, the amount of discussion over recurring issues that have yet to be resolved, despite nearly a year of talking about them, suggests that there is much to be done before Election Day. The PM and the MIS called for the group to decide on several of these issues, but the group did not address them in an organized way.

¶16. (SBU) It is becoming increasingly clear that Guineans are looking to the international community to fund, organize, and guarantee their legislative elections. If the elections fail or are delayed, the international community will likely be blamed. The Guinean Government's abysmal demonstration of financial support, especially for the CENI, is disheartening. The table below represents the GoG's election budget as presented on May 13. END COMMENT.

TABLE: GOG ELECTIONS BUDGET AS OF MAY 13, 2008

Government of Guinea	
General Support	\$8.6 million
CENI	\$0.1 million
TOTAL	\$8.7 million
International Partners	
Voter Kits (EU and UN)	\$6.0 million
CENI and MIS (EU and UN)	\$1.1 million
France	\$0.1 million
ECOWAS	\$0.5 million
United Arab Emirates	\$2.8 million
TOTAL	\$10.5 million
Funding Gap	\$10.7 million
CARTER	